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'Characters of Blood and Flame': Stead and the Tabloid Campaign

In his article, 'Government by Journalism' (1886), W.T. Stead provocatively argued that the press could become a more effective instrument of reform than the House of Commons. While the commercial aspect of the press received barely a mention, Stead recognized that a reforming press needed to attract the attention of readers.

Unfortunately, readers were sometimes deaf to the campaigning zeal of the newspaper, their attention wandering to things that its editor did not consider the pressing issues of the day. The British public, Stead writes, 'often takes a deal of rousing':

Even when its object lessons have been written in characters of blood and flame, it has too often ignored their significance. For the great public, the journalist must print in great capitals, or his warning is unheard.¹

Sensation, for Stead, was the means of attracting attention and 'Government by Journalism' was, in part, a defence of sensationalism in the press. During his years at the *Pall Mall Gazette* (PMG), Stead established and maintained a reputation for sensational exposés, provoking and stoking scandals that demanded action be taken in the name of an outraged public. This chapter explores scandal as a mode of narrative that was sold in the

¹ W.T. Stead, 'Government by Journalism', *Contemporary Review*, 49 (1886), 673. Available in *British Periodicals 1 and 2* (ProQuest, 2007-).

pages of the newspaper, and considers the role sensational revelation plays in nineteenth-century culture more broadly.

Although Stead certainly did not invent the use of sensation in the newspaper press, he rapidly became known for his sensational campaigning journalism. ‘Government by Journalism’ was written by Stead while serving time in prison after the publication of his most sensation story to date, a series of articles called the ‘Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon’. Published after his release in the highbrow monthly *Contemporary Review*, ‘Government by Journalism’ was the closest that Stead ever got to a manifesto for his journalism but, like all manifestos, it should be treated with caution. It was not a definitive statement of Stead’s aims, nor should it be considered applicable to his career as a whole. Instead, its significance derives from its particular context. Given the status of the *Contemporary* and Stead’s self-proclaimed position as a martyred journalist, ‘Government by Journalism’ represented an attempt to justify himself and his methods (for Stead the two were indivisible) to a cultural elite coterminous, but not identical, with the establishment.

This chapter explores the combination of sensation and revelation that typified Stead’s journalism in the *PMG*. Three notorious stories from these years show the way that Stead constructed scandal, sensationally revealing sensational details from (as he presented it at least) an otherwise concealed private life. These incursions into the private lives of strangers transgressed the boundary between private and public, valuing the former as more authentic compared to the latter. Stead might have insisted on a private life that, if

subjected to public scrutiny, would be found unimpeachable, but his journalism depended upon an endlessly generative hidden world that could be drawn upon to create exciting open-ended narratives. Publishing private information might have been a means to prompt reform, but this journalism was dedicated to the maintenance of a concealed realm that could serve as a repository for the further revelations to come.

The Scandals

Under Stead, the *PMG* was responsible for a number of high-profile campaigns. Sometimes these were initiated by the paper, but often the *PMG* took a public stand on news or gossip that originated elsewhere. The three scandals are the ‘Maiden Tribute’ series published 6-10 July 1885; the exposure of the Conservative MP Colonel Hughes Hallett’s affair with a woman supposed to be his stepdaughter in September 1887; and Stead’s campaign against jobbery at the Metropolitan Board of Works from 1886 up to his departure from the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1890. The sensational content revealed by each scandal was slightly different, as was the action that Stead attempted to prompt in response, but by outlining the poetics shared by each, it is possible to delineate the underlying structure of the tabloid campaign. Each might have involved a different type of transgression, but the way in which it was exposed in each was the same.

By 1885 Stead had already marked his tenure as editor of the *PMG* with a couple of notable successes. In January 1884, Stead obtained a last-minute interview with General ‘Chinese’ Gordon while he was on his way to the Congo, marking the first stage in

Stead's ill-fated campaign to have Gordon returned to the Sudan.² Later that year, his 'What is the Truth About the Navy' prompted a national debate about the resourcing of the fleet.³ Based upon interviews with senior officers and containing carefully presented factual information, these articles again demonstrated the power of the New Journalism to bring public opinion to bear on national policy.⁴ The 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon', published the following summer, marked Stead's most successful attempt yet to marshal public opinion; however, although presented as the work of a 'secret commission', this campaign was clearly suffused by the personality of the editor. In the 'Maiden Tribute' articles and their aftermath, Stead was both author, narrator and protagonist, a confusion of roles that he deemed essential to break the scandal but which directly resulted in his prosecution.⁵

The 'Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon' was published over four days in July 1885. The Criminal Law Amendment Bill, which would have raised the age of sexual consent for girls from thirteen to sixteen, was due to be defeated for a third time in the House of Commons. Stead, who viewed the Bill as a necessary legal instrument to protect children against procurement, decided to undertake a first-hand investigation into the brothels of London in order to prove the necessity of the legislation. In June 1885, spurred on by Benjamin Scott, the chair of the London Committee for the Prevention of Traffic in English Girls, Stead convened his secret commission, enlisting the veteran campaigner

² See 'Chinese Gordon for the Sudan' and 'Chinese Gordon on the Soudan', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 January 1884, p. 1, 11-12.

³ See 'What is the Truth About the Navy', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 15 September 1884, p. 1.

⁴ See, for instance, 'The Truth About the Navy by One Who Knows', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 18 September 1884, p. 1.

⁵ See Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1992), pp. 94-5.

Josephine Butler and Bramwell Booth, the son of William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army.⁶ On the Saturday before publication proper, Stead published a short notice to his readers on the front page of the *PMG* about what was to come. The contents of the forthcoming articles, Stead warned his readers, were so sensational that only the ‘most imperious sense of public duty would justify its publication.’ The possible failure of the Bill supplied what Stead would later deem the necessary justification for sensation, and so he hinted at the revelation to come.⁷ Although compelled, ‘in the public interest, to publish the case for the Bill,’ he claimed he had ‘no desire to inflict upon unwilling eyes the ghastly story of criminal developments of modern vice’:

Therefore we say quite frankly to-day that all those who are squeamish, and all those who are prudish, all those who prefer to live in a fool’s paradise of imaginary innocence and purity, selfishly oblivious of the horrible realities which torment those whose lives are passed in the London Inferno, will do well not to read the *Pall Mall Gazette* of Monday and the three following days.⁸

Leaving Sunday for this warning to simmer tantalizingly in the minds of his readers, Stead’s earnest warning could only have stoked interest in the details to be revealed.

The ‘Maiden Tribute’ certainly did not disappoint. The opening article contained accounts of rape, abduction, procurement, and prostitution marked by lurid cross-heads such as ‘Virgins Willing and Unwilling’, ‘The Confessions of a Brothel Keeper’, and

⁶ ‘The Truth About Our Secret Commission: By the Chief Director of Our Investigation’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 July 1885, pp. 1-2. See also Grace Eckley, *Maiden Tribute: The Life of W.T. Stead* (Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2007), pp. 49-50.

⁷ Stead, ‘Government by Journalism’, p. 670.

⁸ ‘Notice to Our Readers: A Frank Warning’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 4 July 1885, p. 1. The emphasis is Stead’s.

‘Strapping Girls Down.’⁹ The style was a curious mix of detached reporting and personal testimony produced via interview; business details of the sex trade and elaborate allusions to classical myth. It also contained the notorious set-piece, ‘A Child of Thirteen bought for £5’, relating how Stead and his accomplices had procured a young girl and arranged for her seduction in a brothel, with Stead himself in the role of the seducer. This first article was sufficient to cause an uproar, boosting the circulation of the *PMG* as readers rushed to see what Stead would print next. The subsequent articles published on Tuesday and Wednesday multiplied examples from the underworld, prompting crowds to form around the *PMG* offices in Northumberland Street, eager to obtain copies of the paper.¹⁰ The final instalment was delayed until Friday, ostensibly because Stead was attempting to establish ‘two very astounding pieces of evidence which, as anything yet brought to light, will astound the world’, but helping, nonetheless, to extend the series over the whole week.¹¹ When it appeared, it contained the most sensational matter of all, explicitly alleging police complicity and providing details of what Stead called the ‘import’ and ‘foreign export’ trade.¹²

The ‘Maiden Tribute’ was a success for Stead, bringing the problem to wider public notice, securing the passage of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill and, perhaps most importantly, creating unprecedented demand for the *PMG*. However, the resulting sensation was both politically awkward and commercially lucrative, making it an

⁹ ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon – I: The Report of Our Secret Commission’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 July 1885, pp. 1-6.

¹⁰ See ‘Siege of Northumberland Street’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 July 1885, p. 6.

¹¹ ‘The Truth About Our Secret Commission’, p. 1.

¹² ‘Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon – IV: [Conclusion] The Report of Our Secret Commission’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 July 1885, pp. 1-6.

attractive target for his rivals. Journalists from *Lloyd's Weekly News* created their own sensation from the circumstances surrounding 'A Child of Thirteen Bought for £5', tracing the girl's mother, Elizabeth Armstrong, and making much of the character of Stead's intermediary, Rebecca Jarrett, an ex-procuress now manager of one of Josephine Butler's rescue homes in Winchester.¹³ Charges were eventually brought against Stead, Jarrett, Booth, Samuel Jacques (Stead's assistant), Elizabeth Combe (from the Salvation Army) and Louise Mourez (a midwife) for abduction, with an additional charge of indecent assault against those deemed responsible for subjecting the girl, Eliza, to medical examination. Ultimately, Stead, Jarrett and Jacques were found guilty of abduction, with Stead and Jacques sentenced to three months and Jarrett six months, all without hard labour. Mourez was found guilty of indecent assault and sentenced to six months with hard labour. Stead made much of the sentence presenting himself as a martyr for the cause and wearing his prison uniform each year on the anniversary of his sentence. Mourez died in prison.

On his release Stead promised Henry Yates Thompson, the proprietor of the *PMG*, that there would be no more 'Maiden Tributing'.¹⁴ Circulation and income from advertisements had both been badly affected by the outcome of the 'Maiden Tribute' and Stead's conciliatory promise was an attempt to get the paper back on track.¹⁵ However, it was not long before Stead was using the *PMG* to draw attention to what he saw as sexual double standards. When the leading radical Liberal MP Sir Charles Dilke was named in the Crawford versus Crawford divorce case in February 1886 but not conclusively

¹³ Walkowitz, p. 106.

¹⁴ Walkowitz, p. 126.

¹⁵ J. W. Robertson Scott, *The Life and Death of a Newspaper* (London: Methuen, 1952), pp. 143-5.

cleared of adultery, Stead had cause to hold him to a promise to resign his seat at Chelsea made the previous August.¹⁶ The scandal rumbled on through the Spring until Dilke lost his seat in the 1886 General election that July, but it provided an important context for an even more sensational revelation, this time concerning a Conservative MP, the following year.

Unlike the Dilke affair, the news that Colonel Hughes-Hallett, the MP for Rochester, had allegedly been caught with a woman reputed to be his stepdaughter was broken exclusively by the *PMG*. As with Dilke, the issue for Stead was a supposed contradiction between the professed public character of a Member of Parliament and his subsequently revealed private character. Stead published the allegation of the affair on the front page of the *PMG* for 20 September 1887 and it was immediately taken up in other papers the following morning. Stead noted that the scandal had been ‘the talk of the town for several days past’, but justified publication – shifting it from private gossip to public news – on the basis of Hughes-Hallett’s public position.¹⁷ Alluding to Dilke’s offer of resignation in August 1885, Stead noted that Hughes-Hallett might not wish to ‘take the responsibility of embarrassing his party by insisting on vacating his seat’ and so the ‘initiative must therefore come from Ministers, or if they hesitate from public opinion.’¹⁸ Despite the pressure, no such initiative was forthcoming, the governing Conservatives fearing that they would lose the seat in the resulting by-election. This, for Stead, was the perfect demonstration of the lack of moral character amongst the political classes and the

¹⁶ See ‘The Crawford-Dilke Case’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 February 1886, pp. 13-4 and ‘Sir Charles Dilke and Chelsea’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 February 1886, p. 1. For an account of the case favourable to Dilke, see Roy Jenkins, *Sir Charles Dilke: A Victorian Tragedy* (1958; London: Fontana, 1968).

¹⁷ See ‘The “Honourable and Gallant” Member’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 September 1887, p. 1.

¹⁸ ‘The “Honourable and Gallant” Member’, p. 1.

perfect justification for prolonging the scandal.¹⁹ Hughes-Hallett eventually resigned his seat in January 1889, the Conservatives losing the seat in the resulting by election in April.

Francis (Frank) Charles Hughes-Hallett married his first wife, Catherine Selwyn, in 1871. Catherine was the (fairly recent) widow of Sir Charles Jasper Selwyn, Lord Chief Justice, who died in 1869. Both Catherine and Sir Charles had been married before and the latter already had two children from his first marriage. Hughes-Hallett and Catherine were married for four years and had two children of their own, Victor and Sybil, before Catherine died in 1875. Hughes-Hallett remarried, this time to an American heiress, Emilie Page von Schaumberg in 1882. The scandal concerned Hughes-Hallett and Beatrice Selwyn, the daughter from Sir Charles's first marriage. They were caught together by Mr Henry Smith, a retired barrister from Norfolk, who immediately threw out Hughes-Hallett and, the following morning, telegraphed his wife with the message: 'Your husband is a villain. I have turned him out of my house.'²⁰ As if the circumstances were not sufficiently lurid, Hughes-Hallett himself was a colourful character. After a couple of failed attempts to be elected Member for Sandwich, he had finally succeeded joining the House after being elected for Rochester in 1885 and then re-elected the following year. Although an unremarkable politician, Hughes-Hallett was a larger-than-life personality, considered something of a social butterfly, well-dressed, fond of society, and someone

¹⁹ See, for instance, 'Colonel Hughes-Hallett and the Archbishop of Canterbury: Too Bad for a Garden Party: But Still Good Enough for the House of Commons', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 July 1888, p. 7.

²⁰ 'The Hughes-Hallett Scandal: Another Statement by the Accused: Further Particulars', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 22 September 1887, p. 1; 'The Hughes-Hallett Scandal: Further Revelations; How the £500 was Transferred: Extraordinary Statement: Letter from Mr W.H. Smith', *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 23 September 1887, p. 5.

whose interests stretched far beyond political or military matters. He was a renowned actor, a skill that had allowed him to travel in disguise through Morocco, Syria and the Holy Land, and he continued to indulge his interest in the theatre, attending first nights and helping to run *Buffalo Bill*.²¹ He also owned a pair of performing poodles, Mouton and Don.²²

As represented by Stead and the *PMG*, Hughes-Hallett was a member of a corrupt establishment able to indulge private vices under the cover of an impeccable public character. As William Cohen argues, sex, as the most concealed aspect of nineteenth-century culture, provides the ‘quintessential and paradigmatic form’ of scandal.²³ The Hughes-Hallett scandal was sensational precisely because it retold sexual secrets, but it also had a further financial dimension. Hughes-Hallett had been entrusted with £5000 of Beatrice Selwyn’s money to invest and, on discovering details of their affair were about to be published, he repaid it in full to her solicitors in an attempt to evade detection. There were also rumours that Hughes-Hallett had settled money on Beatrice, and she had done likewise on him. Beatrice, it transpired, was pregnant with Hughes-Hallett’s child, foregrounding the issue of inheritance in all its senses. Given that the sexual revelations were thrillingly close to incestuous, the news of these financial relations retold the same narrative in another form.

²¹ See ‘A House of Commons Scandal: Revolting Accusation Against a Tory MP: Colonel Hughes-Hallett and his Victim: Alleged Whitewashing by the Whips’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 September 1887, p. 8; ‘London Letter’, *Northern Echo*, 21 September 1887, p. 3

²² ‘A House of Commons Scandal: Revolting Accusation Against a Tory MP’, p. 8.

²³ William A. Cohen, *Sex Scandal: The Private Parts of Victorian Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 9.

The final scandal under discussion concerns corruption at the Metropolitan Board of Works. Unlike the ‘Maiden Tribute’ and the Hughes-Hallett affair, the *PMG* was not the first paper to break the scandal. Also, unlike the two other scandals, there was no suggestion of sexual impropriety. The Board of Works had long had a reputation for unprofessional practice (it was widely known as the ‘Metropolitan Board of Perks’) while its weekly meetings provided a useful source of news for the press. In October 1886, the *Financial News* published a series of articles alleging a major conflict of interest regarding the acquisition of property around the site of Piccadilly Circus. In 1879, the Board of Works acquired the site with a view to cutting through Shaftesbury Avenue. Work was delayed and so R.E. Villiers, a music hall proprietor, leased the site of the Old Pavilion at a cost of £7000 a year, plus £50 paid directly to Frederick William Goddard, the Chief Valuer at the Board and deputy for the superintending architect, for favourable treatment.²⁴ In 1883, when the Old Pavilion was about to be demolished, Villiers met with Goddard and Thomas (‘Tommy’) James Robertson, the Assistant Surveyor at the Board and the other deputy for the superintending architect, who agreed to let him have a building lease for the site in exchange for a public house to be leased to a publican called W.W. Grey. It later transpired that Grey was Robertson’s brother, and that he had split the proceeds from selling his old pub – some £10,000 – between Robertson and Goddard. However, this was not all. It emerged that the valuation of the site had been done by Goddard and Robertson, and that they had accepted Villiers bid of £3000 despite a higher

²⁴ See Jerry White, *London in the 19th Century* (London: Vintage, 2008), pp. 470-1.

bid of £4000 from another client. When Villiers sold the Old Pavilion prior to its demolition, he paid Goddard £5000 from the sale.²⁵

It was only on the publication of a report by a private sub-committee of the Board led by Lord Legheramorne that Stead began to take interest. The report stated that Robertson had been ‘injudicious’ in allowing members of his family to become tenants of the Board. For Stead, this was insufficient and, on the 14 July 1887 he advised his readers that the *PMG* would be waiting to see if the evidence gathered by the sub-committee was to be made public at the next meeting of the Board due to be held the following day.²⁶ A short notice appeared in the paper on the 15 July promising a full report to come. On the 16 July the front page carried an article with the sensational headline of ‘Mr Robertson Must Go – and Twenty More.’²⁷

Stead’s view of Robertson and Goddard’s conduct was similar to the approach he took with the police during the ‘Maiden Tribute’. Just as corruption of the police could be understood given the conditions under which they worked, so too could corruption amongst this different set of public officials. Robertson should be sacked, of course, but his behaviour was a symptom of a deeper problem. Lord Legheramorne’s private report withheld the evidence, recommending that Robertson’s actions only deserved a mild rebuke. In the public meeting of the Board of Works, however, the status of this resolution was transformed. The findings of the report were debated extensively and a

²⁵ David Owen, *The Government of Victorian London, 1855-1889: The Metropolitan Board of Works, the Vestries and the City Corporation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 176-9.

²⁶ ‘Occasional Notes’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 14 July 1887, p. 4.

²⁷ ‘Mr Robertson Must Go – And Twenty More’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 16 July 1887, p. 1.

motion to censure Robertson was passed. Even though a subsequent motion to remove Robertson failed, the debate and passing of the first motion was enough to transform the meaning of Legheramorne's report. The public actions of the Board of Works, even though indecisive, suggested concealed information and supine officials. The solution, as argued in both previous scandals, was publicity, and this, Stead argued, could only be supplied by the press.²⁸

Something must be Done

Scandal operates by producing an alternative version of the past, whose co-presence demands resolution. As such, scandal is always double: there is the event, newly revealed to have taken place in the past, and the retelling of that event in the present. As Cohen notes, scandal is 'a function of mass media, which rely on an anonymous audience far from the event's *dramatis personæ*.'²⁹ Although the rhetoric is one of outraged spectator, the press thus plays a constitutive role in producing scandal. Not only does it recount the scandalous events of the past, but it also provides the necessary context for the resulting outrage. Scandalous events – sometimes, but not always, uncovered by journalists – are marked as special even while they are located amongst the other novel stories that constitute the news. The function of the news is to accommodate the new, providing a narrative frame that can situate potentially disruptive events amongst the familiar and so testify to the continuity of the everyday. Scandal, too, is situated amongst existing narratives in order that readers can make sense of whatever has been revealed.

²⁸ 'The Scandal at the Board of Works: A Case of Loving Darkness rather than the Light Because - ?', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 20 July 1887, pp. 1-2.

²⁹ Cohen, p. 14.

When Stead exposed Hughes-Hallett, it was relatively easy for him to cast the adulterer as a louche member of the upper classes who preyed upon innocent young girls while presenting an unblemished character to the voting public of Rochester. However, unlike the news, scandal also demands a ‘scandalized’: a public, unknown to one another, to whom a reaction can be ascribed.³⁰ As one of the functions of the press in the nineteenth century was to represent a remote but distinct public opinion – a form of social consciousness that could be called upon to exert its influence and curb social and political excess³¹ – both scandal and its subsequent reaction was played out in the pages of the newspaper.

All the events recounted as news have occurred in the past, but those marked as scandal have also been actively concealed. As with all news stories, scandal provides a thrilling shock of the new that is safely mediated through its association with similar scandals already known to readers. However, scandal carries an additional thrill as a result of this act of concealment. Cohen argues that the ‘scandalousness of an act hinges upon the degree of secrecy requisite to its commission’, yet this is not quite right.³² There is certainly a correlation between the extent to which an act is concealed and its scandalousness, but this has little to do with the act itself and more to do with how much damage the perpetrator believes will be caused should it be made public. The revelation of the act by the press realizes this damage by demonstrating a palpable distance between public and private character. The revealed acts, whatever they may be, appear to gesture

³⁰ Cohen, p. 16.

³¹ See Alexander Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 64-66.

³² Cohen, p. 5.

towards a more authentic version of the individual, the act of concealment validating the concealed as important (to the individual) and so authentic. Readers are encouraged to judge this disparity according to the level of concealment necessary to maintain it. They must also, of course, judge the newspapers that recapitulate the act in its telling.

In publicising Hughes-Hallett's actions, Stead deliberately invoked a public opinion distinct from the private networks through which the news had previously circulated. However, Hughes-Hallett also had recourse to public opinion. Once it became clear that details of his adultery were due to be published, he made a number of statements to the press agencies. First of all, he denied that Beatrice Selwyn, who was twenty-two at the time, was his stepdaughter, pointing out that she was his late wife's stepdaughter and that he had never acted as her father. He also attempted to counter the allegations of financial impropriety, confirming that he had possessed her money to invest but that it had now been returned. For Stead, such actions, carried out in public, provided further evidence of corruption. Rather than offer denials or throw himself upon the electors of Rochester, Hughes-Hallett provided an alternative narrative that did not, for Stead, justify any of the key points: the actual familial relationship between Hughes-Hallett and Beatrice was besides the point, it was the fact of her 'seduction' that was at issue; similarly, the return of her money did not diminish the fact that he had once possessed it. At stake was the difference between Hughes-Hallett's character before 20 September 1887 and what it was revealed to be afterwards. In making public Hughes-Hallett's actions, Stead narrated an alternative past that could not be effaced.

Hughes-Hallett's reaction to the story as published in the *PMG* effectively validated its salient points. However, part of narrating scandal is convincing readers of the veracity of the revealed. The fact of concealment confers a degree of the authentic, but readers must be convinced that concealment existed. Although Stead recognized the value of evidence in breaking a story (his 1884 reports on the navy demonstrate his facility with facts and figures), he also depended on the sincerity of his editorial persona. In 'The Future of Journalism', Stead's other key contribution to the *Contemporary Review* in 1886, he argued that impersonal journalism was effete: to 'influence men', he wrote, 'you must be a man.'³³ Stead's manly personal journalism was predicated on two things: firstly, readers would trust the editor because he (and despite Stead's feminism, his concept of the editor here is unremittingly masculine) risked his character in the pages of the paper; secondly, the editor, because of his personal connections with both sources and readers, would 'know his facts'.³⁴ The article, published, like 'Government by Journalism', in the aftermath of the 'Maiden Tribute', was a *post hoc* defence of Stead's journalistic technique. Throughout the 'Maiden Tribute' Stead attempted to move from the personal account of the investigation to the more general presentation of facts, creating a credible case without diminishing its sensational effect. The opening columns of the first instalment – including the entirety of the article published on the front page – were dedicated to the elaboration of a mythical framework that associated the Cretan labyrinth with modern London. This move from the general to the specific, the mythic to the contemporary, was countered by an attempt to substitute personal crusade for distanced investigation. Stead claimed that regardless of his personal feelings about 'morality and

³³ 'The Future of Journalism', *Contemporary Review*, 50 (1886), p. 663.

³⁴ 'Future of Journalism', p. 664.

chastity’, he asked ‘only for the repression of crime.’³⁵ This was disingenuous, as much of the case for legal reform was based on precisely these grounds, as was the ideological ground through which Stead (and many of his contemporaries) approached the issue.³⁶ Nevertheless, it served to distance Stead from a personal interest in the investigation, vital given that the bulk of the evidence was produced through personal testimony.

The resulting trial set out the difficulties of personal investigation in a way that, Stead, in his articles for the *Contemporary Review*, resolutely avoided. Stead intended the ‘Maiden Tribute’ to be ‘a revelation and a warning – a revelation of the system and a warning to those who may be its victims.’³⁷ He excised ‘names, dates and localities referred to’, leaving a generalized account of a system structured through personal encounters with people who may or may not have been real. Stead’s preferred technique was the universal interview – a way of producing authoritative but generalizable information from personal encounter – but as Stead was the only identifiable subject, the different personalities that he encountered became modulations of his own. The emphasis may have been on the information about the underworld, but the narrative was focused upon how such information was obtained.³⁸ In court, when the circumstances surrounding the procurement of Eliza Armstrong were interpreted against a different evidentiary regime, this method was found lacking. ‘A Child of Thirteen bought for £5’ provided an account narrated in the third person that detailed the circumstances leading up to Eliza’s rape – circumstances that pointed to this generalized criminal system – but

³⁵ ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon – I’, p. 2.

³⁶ See Deborah Gorham, ‘The “Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon” Reexamined: Child Prostitution and the Idea of Childhood in Late Victorian England’, *Victorian Studies*, 21 (1978), pp. 353-379.

³⁷ ‘The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon – I’, p. 3.

³⁸ See Walkowitz, p. 85.

left only (very suggestive) asterisks to deny that it occurred. Stead's tactic of dressing up fact as fiction failed as the court decided that the fact that the fiction concealed was itself a fiction.

The doubleness of scandal meant that the press was always vulnerable to the charge of hypocritical profiteering, able to exploit the lurid details of the concealed act while condemning its concealment. Stead, with his explicitly personalized journalism and, at times, mobile politics, was particularly vulnerable to such charges. The 'Maiden Tribute', in particular, seemed to allow Stead to have it both ways. His narrative, revelling in the personal journey into the underworld, led some to believe that his moral outrage was a pose he adopted to allow him to recount sordid material. The *PMG* was selling to Stead's supporters, but its scandalous content appealed much more widely, giving the paper its highest ever circulation. This demand was carefully structured through narrative suspense and aggressive marketing; the difficulties in meeting it became another aspect of the story as represented in its pages. Similar charges followed Stead's persecution of Hughes-Hallett. As a Conservative MP, allegations of political bias (the *PMG* was a Liberal paper) were to be expected, and these were duly countered with reference to Stead's treatment of Dilke the preceding year. Yet the 'Maiden Tribute' cast a long shadow, and Stead's character was considered tainted in some quarters as a result of his conviction. Even though Stead did not know Hughes-Hallett personally, some felt that the *PMG* had published the story solely to profit from its lurid details. When accused of provoking the scandal, Stead informed readers he had been

acting in consultation with Beatrice Selwyn, representing himself as an editor acting on personal information in the service of an impersonal moral cause.³⁹

The pleasures of scandal were also double. There was the prurient, but often disavowed, pleasure in the transgressive act revealed in the pages of the newspaper. There was also the pleasure derived from the mediated nature of shame. At the end of the ‘Maiden Tribute’ Stead called for ‘publicity, publicity, publicity’, a call he echoed two years later when lambasting the metropolitan press for what he saw as their neglect to cover the scandal at the Board of Works.⁴⁰ Publicity shamed those who transgressed, whether private individuals or public institutions, holding their conduct to account against a public ideal. However, if, as Alexander Welsh argues, ‘public opinion may be thought of as the social force that makes knowledge efficacious’, then shame describes its motive force, delineating the deficiency that public opinion attempted to amend.⁴¹ Readers of scandalous narratives experienced shame at second-hand: they did not have a personal relationship with the individual or institution whose secrets had been revealed; but they also did not know the public upon whose behalf the newspaper articulated outrage. The pleasure for the reader came in knowing that they, unlike the person or institution whose affairs had been publicized, were innocent of such transgressions; but it also came from knowing that their own transgressions remained private. Readers, as members of a mediated public sphere, were positioned to enjoy both the humiliation of their (usually) social betters and the outrage that resulted.

³⁹ ‘The Parliamentary Scandal: Decision of the Tory Executive: “An Insult to the British Army”’: A Letter from Captain Selwyn MP’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 October 1887, p. 8.

⁴⁰ ‘Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon – IV’, p. 6; ‘The Scandal at the Board of Works: A Case of Loving Darkness rather than the Light Because - ?’, p. 2.

⁴¹ Welsh, *George Eliot and Blackmail*, p. 66.

Stead, though, wanted more from his readers. In the 'Future of Journalism' Stead imagined the journalist's role as establishing public opinion on the basis of private conversation. Unlike the interview, which was public, this according to Stead, was the private phase of interrogation.⁴² The elision of private and public opinion here, and the assumption of unity in the face of a diverse society, complemented the rhetoric of scandal. The assumption underpinning the 'Maiden Tribute', the exposure of Hughes-Hallett, and the scandal at the Board of Works was that whatever was revealed was unquestionably wrong and that the public – whoever they were – were united in their outrage. The implicit argument in each scandal was that the various transgressions would not have occurred had each been sufficiently scrutinized. Stead did not argue that the press need scrutinize everything: in fact, given the assumed unity of public and private opinion, the press need only act to police the private. It was only when nothing was done about child prostitution in the West End, for instance, or that the political classes condoned sexual scandal, that the press needed to bring the full weight of public opinion to bear. Stead already conceived of public opinion as theological, claiming that when people despaired of the power of public opinion to right injustice it was as if 'they sullenly confessed God was dead', and this model of public opinion posed a (perhaps more fallible) version in the private consciences of a society he imagined was made up of networks of individuals.⁴³

⁴² Stead, 'Future of Journalism'. p. 666.

⁴³ Stead, 'Future of Journalism', p. 670. Stead might have conceived public opinion in theological terms, but he did not necessarily believe it must be uncritically obeyed, see p. 664.

Yet scandal was pleasurable precisely because of the difference between public and private life. Its dynamic might have necessitated breaching the boundary between the two, but whatever was publicized was still necessarily marked as belonging to the private. For Cohen, scandal, especially sexual scandal, is a way of re-establishing the private by making it public.⁴⁴ The unspeakability of sex in the period meant that scandal was endlessly generative, marking the private even as it was elaborated through public narratives. If the way Stead discussed scandal seemed to suggest a model of absolute surveillance, then the way he deployed scandal was designed to preserve and propagate the private through the generation of copy. Stead might have articulated a personalized model of the press, with society made up of personal connections that also linked editor and reader, but in practice his newspaper campaigns exploited and reaffirmed the distinctions between private and public. As Stead knew (and the varying fortunes of the *PMG* amply demonstrated), scandal was an effective way of creating a unified readership out of a disparate society. As the logic of scandal was pathological and its strategy indirect, its politics were inherently conservative (although its effects proved much more unpredictable). The revealed act, its novelty warranting its authenticity, presented a state of affairs that demanded remedial action but the scope of this action was restricted to a specific set of circumstances, leaving any underlying causes unexamined. In this way sexual scandal, political corruption, or corporate fraud always appeared new, even while they became associated in their telling with half-remembered scandals from the past. Scandal was an effective means of scrutinizing institutions and individuals, but the easy solutions that it generated – the demand that something must be done – ensured that there would be further scandals in future. The role of scandal was generative, maintaining an

⁴⁴ Cohen, *Sex Scandal*, p. 4.

idea of the private, unexamined but examinable, that preserved a store of concealed acts to be drawn upon in future. Stead pioneered the tabloid campaign, but to appreciate his achievement, we must attend to the way scandal was used as well as its influence on the model of journalism that it ostensibly served.